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U.S. Rep Mark Kirk sees leadership qualities in Rolling Meadows' Bryan Anderson.

"I want him to become a noted national leader," the Highland Park Republican said. "Someone who can bring Republicans and Democrats together to thank our disabled veterans."

That's the reason Kirk invited Army Staff Sgt. Anderson as his guest tonight to sit in the gallery during President Bush's State of the Union address.

Anderson also will deliver his own remarks today at a rally supporting the construction of an American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial. Anderson lost his legs and left arm Oct. 23, 2005, after a roadside bomb exploded while he was driving a Humvee in Baghdad, Iraq. The trip is just the latest stop for the 25-year-old, whose story of survival captivated the public.

"It's been crazy," said his mother, Janet Waswo. "I don't know where he's going to go from here."

Marine Staff Sgt. Wade Cobar of Schaumburg will also be in Washington listening to the president. His invitation came courtesy of Sen. Dick Durbin.

Cobar, married with two children, was deployed to Iraq in August. He broke his legs and underwent reconstructive knee surgery in October after being caught in a blast while delivering supplies to a river sweep along the Syrian border. He uses crutches to get by and is mending at the Bethesda Naval Hospital in Maryland.

Giving the veterans a rare meeting with their commander in chief is a small gesture to show appreciation for their sacrifices, said Joe Shoemaker, a spokesman for the senator. Durbin's office has invited veterans for the past three years, and only about 500 tickets gallery tickets are available.

"It's just Sen. Durbin's way of honoring their service," Shoemaker said.

Anderson is excited about the construction of the monument, but not about listening to the president's speech.

"I'm not very much political," he admitted.

White House officials have been alerted to Anderson's attendance, but Kirk doesn't anticipate Anderson will garner a mention during the president's remarks.

The American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial would be the first monument honoring those permanently hurt in combat. There are about 3 million disabled war veterans in America. Anderson wasn't sure what he was going to say and was still prepping his comments late Monday.

"I would be very happy if we could get this done," Anderson said.

Kirk and U.S. Rep. Dennis Moore, a Kansas Democrat, are pushing legislation for the treasury to issue a commemorative coin to raise money for the memorial. Kirk said he hopes Anderson can help become the face of disabled veterans and expects his presence will speed up construction. There is no set timetable for the project.

"It's not a political issue. This is something that we need to do as Americans," Kirk said. "Our veterans, whether in Iwo Jima, or Normandy, or even Afghanistan today, they weren't wounded as Republicans or Democrats; they were wounded as Americans."

Cobar also will join Durbin's other guests including Chicago's Mayor Richard Daley, his wife, Maggie, and his son Patrick at the secretary of senate's dinner, which will be attended by the president and other dignitaries. Patrick Daley enlisted in the Army and is set for deployment in the Middle East later this year.

Meanwhile, Anderson's life continues at a manic pace. In the past year, the Rolling Meadows Chamber of Commerce raised \$150,000 for renovations to his home so he could better deal with his injuries. The city renamed a street in his honor. He's also been the subject of an Esquire cover story. And he even played ping pong with Bears All-Pro kicker Robbie Gould last week.

Anderson will get to see Gould again in Miami in less than two weeks because he scored Super Bowl tickets. But then again, he went to the big game last year, when he saw his second-favorite team, the Pittsburgh Steelers, win it all. Hopefully his presence will bring good luck for Bears' fans.

"I don't know what to expect next," his mother said. "I really don't."

He's avoided politically tinged remarks in interviews but said he wants to increase awareness for other disabled veterans. During his stay in Washington, Kirk also plans on introducing Anderson to other congressmen, including California Congressman Bob Filner, chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs. Kirk doesn't want to push Anderson too much and said they'll measure the level of Anderson's participation.

"With millions of disabled veterans and their family members, there are a number of opportunities for him if he develops his leadership," Kirk said. But Anderson's mother doesn't quite envision the same leadership role Kirk forecasts for her son.

"He's really great at answering questions and talking about his injuries, but he's not really a public speaker," Waswo said.